

# A Family's Encounter with the Deadly Silent Killer

On November 19, 2002, Patrolman Jermone Renville, a Sisseton Wahpeton Law Enforcement Officer, was dispatched to the home of Ms. Caroline Campbell in Enemy Swim. A family of four complained of severe headaches, tingling lips, and numbness in the tongue. Upon entry, Patrolman Renville realized that the carbon monoxide detector was alarming and that he too was experiencing headache, eyestrain, and tingling lips. The family was removed from the home and placed in a motel. One family member was treated at the IHS Hospital and later released while other members felt better after breathing fresh air.

Upon investigation the following day by Sisseton-Wahpeton Housing Authority staff and IHS Environmental Health, it was determined that the oven had not been adjusted properly for propane gas. The homeowner had been baking for several hours prior to the alarm sounding. Previously, the oven had not been used. The problem was easily resolved by just a quick turn of a valve and the family was able to return home. Ms. Janita Abraham credits the carbon monoxide detector for saving their lives. "If it was not for the detector going off, we may have just stayed in the house."

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that is produced when any fuel is incompletely burned. Annually, tens of thousands of people seek medical attention due to CO exposure. In addition, more than 500 people die through accidental exposure, 200 associated with home fueling burning equipment.

Ms. Caroline Campbell obtained her Nighthawk CO detector from the IHS Sisseton Office of Environmental Health (OEH). For the past 2 years, Mr. John Leith, Environmental Health Officer has provided CO detectors through a giveaway program to homeowners. The program was developed due to the high percentage of homes on the Lake Traverse Reservation that utilize propane, fuel oil, and wood heating systems (80%) and because of the large number of requests received from homeowners for CO testing. In many cases, his testing showed the presence of CO in amounts large enough to cause mild symptoms. To date, approximately 200 CO detectors

have been given away. For more information and a FREE carbon monoxide detector, contact Mr. Leith at (605) 698-7606 ext. 3071 or Ms. Lori Bernard Trevino, Community Health Educator at (605) 698-7267. The detectors were purchased in part with funds from the Aberdeen Area Injury Prevention program and the Sisseton IHS OEH program.



Janita Abraham and Caroline Campbell standing in front of the oven that was functioning improperly.